

fathoms' station). The male differs from the female in the form of the chelipeds, which in the male have a club-shaped palm. The branchial formula is exactly the same as that of *Latreillia pennifera*: there are 8 branchiæ on either side, namely 3 pleurobranchiæ (somites xi. xii. and xiii.), 2 pairs of arthrobranchiæ (appendages ix. and x.), and a small podobranchia on the second maxillipeds.

On a new species of Bhimraj (Dissemurus), with some observations on the so-called family Dicruridæ.—By F. FINN, B.A., F.Z.S., Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Museum.

(Plate II.)

[Received July 28th; Read August 2nd, 1899].

About three years ago I saw at the establishment of Mr. W. Rutledge, of Entally, a living specimen of a Bhimraj or Racket-tailed Drongo, which at once attracted my attention by its pied plumage, and I purchased it for the Museum. Unfortunately the bird did not long survive, being in poor condition when received, and its skin was transferred to the Museum collection. At the time I regarded it merely as a curious variety, but, taking into consideration the extreme rarity of symmetrical albinism (except in the case of albinoid or pallid varieties), and the fact that the appearance of this specimen is not suggestive of ordinary albinism, but rather of specific difference, I venture to characterize it as new, and shall name it after Major Alcock, I.M.S., Superintendent of the Indian Museum, in recognition of the kind encouragement he has always extended to my ornithological studies.

Dissemurus alcocki, sp. nov. (Plate II).

Habit and size of an ordinary example of *Dissemurus paradiseus* with a moderate crest; colour also as in that species; black glossed with steel-blue, with the following exceptions: the upper and lower wing-coverts except the primary-coverts, inner scapulars, axillaries, upper tail-coverts and the lower plumage from the breast downwards, which are white edged with black, and the rump and under tail-coverts, which are entirely white. There are also some white streaks on the lower breast, and a shading of white on the inner webs of the tail-feathers and innermost secondaries, and on the outer webs of the outer secondaries. The black edging of the white feathers is best developed on the greater wing-coverts, where it extends right round the tip of the feather. Soft parts as in *D. paradiseus* of the same age. Bill from gape $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches; wing 6; shank 1.1.

The tail is unfortunately broken, so that its length, and that of the whole bird, is not worth giving. The resemblance of this individual in all essential structural characters to the ordinary Bhimraj is, however, so great, that I do not doubt that the tail will prove to have a similar form with long racket-tipped outermost feathers.

The bird was a young hand-reared one, like all Bhimrajs I have seen for sale. Whether it would have lost any of the white on its first moult is of course doubtful, but *D. paradiseus*, unlike many other Drongos, is not much marked with white below in its youth, so that it is quite possible that the white lower parts are permanent in this form.

Mr. Rutledge tells me that he has had three similar specimens to that described, and that they all came from Segowli in the Gorakhpur district. The natives, he says, consider the form distinct, and call it the "King Bhimraj." Even should it, however, prove to be only a very marked aberration or sport, like the black-winged Pea-fowl (*Pavo nigripennis*) or the Ringed Guillemot (*Uria ringvia*), it is well worthy of note and of the attention of ornithologists, to say nothing of its remarkable beauty of marking, which should recommend it to fanciers, with whom in India the common Bhimraj is so popular.*

I take this opportunity of raising the question as to whether the so-called family *Dicruridæ* deserves its rank, and ought not rather to be retained in the *Laniidæ*, as Mr. Oates has very rightly, in my opinion, done with the Swallow-shrikes "*Artamidæ*" and Cuckoo-shrikes "*Campyphagidæ*." That gentleman says, it is true, in the "Fauna of British India" (Birds, Vol I., p. 308), that the Drongos "form one of the best-defined families of the Passeres, their generally black plumage and forked tail of ten feathers sufficing to distinguish them readily." This

* This popularity is well deserved, for the Bhimraj is probably the most accomplished mimic known. Its powers in this respect have been alluded to by Jerdon (Birds of India, Vol. I, p. 49) and I myself have heard a very fine specimen once in Mr. Rutledge's possession imitate the mewing of a cat and the song of a canary to perfection. Mr. R. D. Oldham, of the Geological Survey, told me of one which he heard *talk* with a perfectly human voice; and the bird used by myself in bionomical experiments (see J. A. S. B., 1897), after a sojourn of a year or two at the Zoo learnt to imitate, in addition to other sounds, the babbling of a Cockatoo, in which one word at least "Baba" was quite distinctly audible. When I kept several together, before I began experimenting, they displayed a marked partiality for the leaves of *Bougainvillea*, and as the identical bird alluded to above, which was one of them, ate plantain readily, I am inclined to think that the corvine bill of this form is connected with a corvine omnivorousness of habits. The Bhimraj is also very affectionate and fond of notice, and, were it not that it needs (though too generally it does not get it) a very large cage and a good supply of living food, would make an ideal cage-bird.

is quite true, but I submit that all these characters taken together are not of family value even for Passeres. Colour of plumage cannot be allowed to go for much, and besides, we have the blue-grey *Dicrurus leucogenys*—showing one of the most characteristic of the Laniine hues. A forked tail recurs among the Cuckoo-shrikes in *Campochæra* and *Pteropodocys*, and the number of feathers in it cannot be considered of much import, when we allow the Thrushes of the genus *Oreocinclæ* to have twelve or fourteen, and yet remain together.

An anatomical distinction, which Mr. Oates has not noticed, is that the *Dicruridæ*, alone among Passeres, lack the accessory semitendinosus muscle, as recorded by Garrod. But I fail to see that an isolated anatomical character like this, especially in the case of these Drongos to family rank, any more than the possession of powder-down patches (likewise not mentioned by Mr. Oates) does the Swallow-shrikes, which alone among their order exhibit them. The Drongos, I may mention, so far as I have been able to observe, all use their feet like other arboreal shrikes, which they resemble in build, hopping when on the ground, and grasping their food in one foot—even sometimes carrying it thus. (See J. A. S. B., May 1898).

It may be objected that on the score of convenience it would be better to have all the so nearly-related genera of *Dicruridæ* bracketed together: but it seems to me that it would be more convenient and natural still to regard them all as constituting one natural but somewhat polymorphic genus. The degree of furcation of the tail and the style of crest are hardly to be considered as of generic importance, taken against the general similarity of build; and the differing forms of bill can be largely explained by reference to the habits of the species. From what Dr. Sharpe states in the British Museum Catalogue of Birds, Vol. III. pp. 230, 235, it may be seen that a distinct gradation exists between two such extreme forms as the shrike-like, purely zoophagous *Dicrurus ater* and the slender-billed, partially melliphagous *Chibia hottentotta*: and if these can be united, I see no reason why the genus should not be made to embrace the entire family.



Wing - covert

A. C. Chowdhary, Del. et. lith

DISSEMURUS ALCOCKI